8-2013

Nine Legends: Sketches of Remarkable People Based on Personal Relationships

Thomas Vail

NINE LEGENDS

Thomas Vail

Vail, Thomas. *Nine Legends.* Cleveland, Ohio: 2004.

EISBN: ISBN13:978-1-936323-43-2

ISBN10: 1-936323-43-5

This digital edition was prepared by MSL Academic Endeavors, the imprint of the Michael Schwartz Library at Cleveland State University (2013).

NINE LEGENDS

SKETCHES OF REMARKABLE PEOPLE
BASED ON PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

THOMAS VAIL

PUBLISHER AND EDITOR OF THE PLAIN DEALER 1963-1991

NINE LEGENDS

SKETCHES OF REMARKABLE PEOPLE BASED ON PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

THOMAS VAIL

PUBLISHER AND EDITOR OF THE PLAIN DEALER 1963-1991

CLEVELAND, OHIO

DEDICATION

To my parents, Herman Lansing and Delia White Vail, who set high standards and inspired me to always try to represent the very best

The author's parents, dancing at his wedding on September 15, 1951, in Bedford, New York

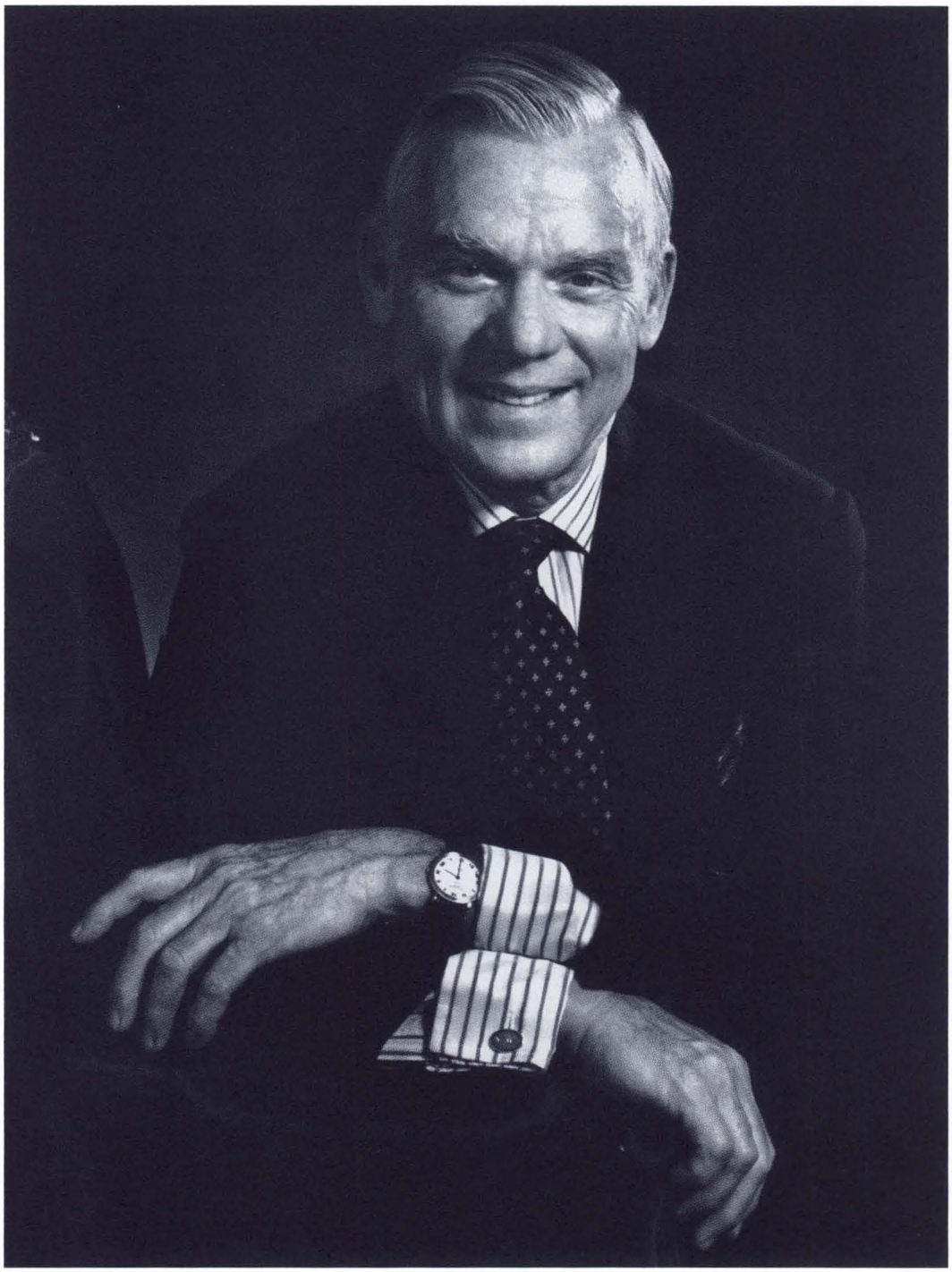
Printed in the United States of America

Credits
Diana Tittle
Project Manager

Stacy Vickroy
Production Artist

Kathleen Mills
Copyeditor

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Thomas Vail by Yousuf Karsh of Ottawa

INTRODUCTION

During my 42 years in the newspaper business, 28 of them spent as publisher and editor of *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland, Ohio, I was able to meet one on one with many world leaders, heads of state (including nine American presidents) and others of remarkable abilities.

The following personality sketches of some of the legendary figures I have met include a few geniuses as well.

Much has been written about whether people shape events or whether events shape people. Admitting the importance of the environment in which human beings operate, it is difficult to avoid the observation that remarkable individuals have indeed altered the course of history, some more than others.

Although assessing the historic significance of these individuals is outside my reach, I can say this about my subjects.

Leaders and geniuses have some things in common.

These unusual and remarkable types all have strong vision. They see desirable objectives and possibilities to strive for beyond the ordinary reaction to existing situations.

Armed with their vision, leaders and geniuses assert themselves tirelessly, always focused on the objective of creating something better.

Such remarkable individuals have been found throughout human history in all fields of human endeavor, leading to progress throughout the ages.

My character sketches are personal impressions, at times gained from only one private meeting, sometimes from several meetings, sometimes from long acquaintance. I have not included the nine U.S. presidents I have known as I have written an earlier book about them.

I hope my readers will enjoy these personal observations about some of the people who have shaped events to a greater or lesser degree during the latter half of the 20th century.

MARGARET THATCHER

Prime Minister of England

Margaret Thatcher was the most practical and realistic head of government I have ever met. It's amazing to consider that this grocer's daughter may be judged, after Winston Churchill, the most important British political leader of the 20th century. There are several reasons why she was and is so remarkable.

Mrs. Thatcher was the first woman to become a British prime minister.

With an 11-year tenure as prime minister, she served longer than any of her predecessors during the previous 150 years.

She single-handedly led her Conservative Party in its attempt to stop Britain's movement toward union-inspired socialism. Like President Reagan, she saw the private sector, rather than government, as the main engine of progress.

She faced down Argentina in the Falkland Islands.

She completed her tenure without a breath of scandal.

I met privately with Mrs. Thatcher in 1983 at the height of her powers at No. 10 Downing Street, the official London residence of the British prime minister. I had been told that my interview should not take more than an hour and that it was to be off the record. However, immediately upon being ushered into the prime minister's upstairs sitting room, I brought up the question about whether our conversation was on or off the record. She suggested, "Why not on the record?" Her openness, of course, appealed to me enormously. Mrs. Thatcher then rearranged some chairs, saying: "So we can look at each other directly."

Then began one of the most commonsense, down-to-earth conversations I have ever had with a world leader. Mrs. Thatcher explained carefully and in great detail her view that the British government's move to the left and steady expansion of welfare programs had resulted in her citizens' loss of

individualism and desire to take care of themselves. She conceded that there were some things that government should do, such as enforcing laws, maintaining security and justice, preserving freedom and providing for the defense of the nation. But she felt, as did President Reagan, her good friend and ally, that solutions to national and world problems should come not only from government but also from individuals. Acting on her beliefs, Margaret Thatcher played a significant role in ensuring that Britain did not become even more of a welfare state.

During a later conversation I had with her, Mrs. Thatcher made another interesting comment about her political philosophy. She said, "Mr. Vail, keep in mind that the United States is the only nation that was ever founded on the principle that the people have the power and give it to their leaders. With every other government in the history of the world, it was the other way around. Government handed rights to the people. In your country power came from the people and was given upward, whereas in every other country in the world, power was at the top and was rather reluctantly given downward to the people over a long period of time."

I did not find Mrs. Thatcher to be the bossy martinet that some in the media have depicted her. She was and is an attractive woman, always well turned out, with a sharp mind that never strays from the point. She is not at all emotional and has a sense of humor, although not a great one. She survives on three or four hours of sleep. Her energy and hard work are legendary. She does not bother much with those who are less forceful than she. She once referred to her successor, John Major, as part of the "B team."

I asked the prime minister what she liked to do when she wasn't working. She mentioned interests in gardening and reading. She added, "Of course, we all read Winston."

As I am a student of Churchill, I asked Mrs. Thatcher if she had read *Thoughts and Adventures*, a wonderful book he wrote in 1932. I thought this might stump her. I was wrong. When I mentioned an essay from the book concerning whether one would like to have the chance to live one's life over again, Mrs. Thatcher responded in a way that showed she had read this particular essay and liked it.

Mrs. Thatcher's most significant remarks concerned the role of Britain today. Instead of focusing on technology or material goals, she described the

British as a truly "global people," observing that her countrymen had always been "outward looking" from their small island. Indeed, this impulse had built the British Empire. She added that the most significant British contribution was "political freedom, justice, law and liberty." Mrs. Thatcher felt it was these principles, rather than the sinews of power, that would forever ensure Britain a significant position in the world.

What a refreshing point of view.

It is hard to sum up Margaret Thatcher. Strong, forthright, practical, she had a vision about how to reduce government solutions to problems and to increase private initiative. Mrs. Thatcher did a great deal to adjust the course of British life, but she was the leader of a declining nation. Britain's loss of empire and participation in two world wars have exhausted the nation. The field now for a British prime minister is limited. Britain can now do little that will make much difference in global affairs. The economy of Britain is about the size of Italy's.

Since Mrs. Thatcher's time, the Labor Party, under Prime Minister Tony Blair, has moved to the center and embraced some of the positions and programs that the Conservative (Tory) Party under Mrs. Thatcher espoused. Blair may have been taking a cue from Democratic President Bill Clinton, who saw that he could win votes and stay in power by embracing the middle-of-the-road ideas of the Republicans.

Like most self-made people, Mrs. Thatcher finds it difficult to accept the fact that she is no longer at the center of power. She came a long way from her origins to become prime minister at age 53. Hopefully, she will come to accept retirement gracefully, knowing of the important and remarkable role she has played.

Perhaps my readers will be interested in a short description of No. 10 Downing Street. It is a well-designed, charming but low-key residence in which almost any family would feel at home. The Georgian-style exterior of the building is tasteful, but not imposing. There is a nice-enough garden at the back. Next door, at No. 11 Downing Street, is the residence of the chancellor of exchequer. This house is similar in appearance to No. 10, but with fewer rooms. Both residences have simple black front doors. Security at both in 1983 was "light" by today's standards.

I have visited both places several times. I find them a perfect reflection of a parliamentary democracy. Nothing about either residence gives you the impression it is important. There are many government offices in London, such

as the Colonial Office, that do reflect the glory of Empire days. No. 10, on the other hand, is so unpretentious that you would never give it a second glance if you didn't know that the prime minister resides there.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

ANWAR SADAT
President of Egypt

President Anwar Sadat of Egypt exuded charisma. Few world leaders I have encountered had his degree of personal magnetism. Even President Jimmy Carter said at a private meeting with me in the Oval Office, "I wish I could be like Anwar Sadat."

It was President Carter who brought President Sadat and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel to Camp David in 1978 to work out the only significant peace agreement ever forged between a major nation of the Arab world and Israel. But it was Sadat, a clerk's son, who had the daring and vision to initiate talks with his military enemy, bringing hope and the promise of peace and prosperity to the many backward and deeply divided people of the Middle East.

I interviewed Sadat in 1975 at the president's summer residence about an hour from Cairo near what is called "the Barrier" on the Nile River. Sadat was of good height and build, but he was not handsome by Egyptian standards. Egyptians with light complexions have the highest social status, as they believe themselves to be descended from the pharaohs. Sadat's complexion was medium dark. He rose from the ranks of the military, a profession that is not especially well regarded in Egypt. But his personality was unforgettable.

The president and I had never met before. I took it as a compliment that he was willing to meet alone with me, knowing that I was on a tour of the Middle East that would take me to Israel as well as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. I found out later how unusual it was to be allowed a private interview with the president of Egypt when I called the head of the Associated Press in Cairo to compare notes about Sadat. The correspondent confided that he had never met Sadat.

What happened during my interview was as unusual as it was dramatic.

My first question to Sadat was, "Why have you become the leader in the Middle East?" This stopped the president for a moment, but then he answered in a most forthright way, saying, "Because I know what I want." Sadat went on to explain how determined he was to forge peace between Israel and Egypt.

Knowing that he was beginning to be troubled by the continuing Russian presence in Egypt, I asked, "How are you getting along with the Russians?"

President Sadat looked at me and said, "Well, Russia's Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko is coming here tomorrow, and I really don't want to get into that." I then said to him, "Well, off the record?" Sadat looked me straight in the face and said, "All right, off the record, I'll tell you." This from a head of state who had first met me only minutes before.

The president of Egypt proceeded to tell me in heated terms how terrible he found the Soviets, even though they had helped to finance the construction of the Aswan High Dam on the Nile. Waving his arms and jumping out of his chair, he went into chapter and verse about how the technicians sent by the U.S.S.R. to help Egypt build the dam and assist with other nation-building projects were nothing but intelligence operators. Denouncing them all as "just spies," he complained that they were attempting to interfere with what he, President Sadat, was trying to do.

One has to remember that the Russians had stepped into the breach when the United States had withdrawn its offer of financial support for the Aswan Dam, which was completed in 1968. Henry Cabot Lodge was the American representative to the United Nations when then cold-war Secretary of State John Foster Dulles persuaded President Eisenhower to back out of the deal because of the "non-alignment" policy of Sadat's predecessor, Gamal Abdel Nasser. Lodge personally told me that he had disagreed with the withdrawal. (Nasser seized the Suez Canal two years later in 1956.)

Sadat became extremely agitated as he described the Russian representatives in Egypt as "the worst thing I have ever experienced." Finally he calmed down.

I knew I was sitting on a major story. Few knew then that President Sadat was about to kick the Russians out of Egypt.

In the story I filed about my interview with President Sadat, I worked my way around the off-the-record agreement by not quoting Sadat directly. I

simply reported that Russian representatives in Egypt were not likely to last too much longer. The story was picked up by the Associated Press and carried around the world. It did not embarrass Sadat, who went on to tell Gromyko precisely what he had told me. The matter came to a head two or three months later, and the Russians were soon gone from Egypt.

I will never forget that Sadat had enough faith in my discretion to pour out his true feelings about the Russians and so many other topics as well.

What a tragedy that this farsighted leader of the Arab world was gunned down by extremist elements among his own people on October 6, 1981. It is ironic that a warlike figure like the current Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon survives, while peacemakers like President Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel are eliminated. Perhaps this tells us something about why this conflict in the Middle East may never be settled.

To visit Egypt even today is to see a nation with a glorious past and no discernible future. Former President Nasser (whom I never met) once told a friend of mine that he, Nasser, had to stir up opposition to Israel because otherwise the Egyptians would focus on the hopelessness of their lives and the corruption of their government and turn on him. At least President Sadat expressed a desire for peace and a better life for Egyptians, a semi-illiterate, desperately poor population living in seemingly medieval conditions.

Whether Sadat could have succeeded is an unanswered question. His vision was more about hope than substance. He never pushed for domestic reform or real change. He seemed to lean on the United States for aid, which flowed more freely after the Camp David accords.

In any event, Anwar Sadat appeared like a brilliant comet in the sky and just as suddenly disappeared into the darkness. How sad that this glittering personality was removed from the scene and in such a violent way.

WILLY BRANDT

Chancellor of West Germany

The most remarkable and touching moment I have ever spent with a head of state came during a private interview in 1973 with Willie Brandt, Chancellor of West Germany.

I have included Willy Brandt in this book not so much for his achievements but for the remarkable things he told me about the United States.

I first met Brandt at the White House with President Nixon in 1973. I mentioned to Brandt I had plans to come to West Germany. President Nixon in a most helpful way turned to Brandt and said, "This is Tom Vail, head of a most respected American newspaper, and he is someone you should talk to."

Having received this fine introduction of me, Brandt could not exactly avoid what President Nixon was suggesting!

Brandt said, in a precise way, "Meet me at the Opel Manufacturing plant in Frankfurt at 4:00 p.m. [he mentioned a certain date], and we will ride up together to Bonn [the West German capital] on Hermann Goering's former private train."

I turned up at the exact time and date at the Frankfurt Opel plant. We boarded the chancellor's seven-car train and were on our way for several hours to Bonn. We had some drinks and something to eat in a special dining car set up for the chancellor's use.

We discussed issues of the day. During this conversation Chancellor Brandt expressed his view that the future of West Germany was not as a strong nation only, but also as an important player in a united Europe.

He said (prophetically as it has turned out) that the unification of Europe would be first along economic, then political lines and then a common defense would emerge as well.

Then came a moment I could not have foreseen.

I mentioned casually that the United States was having some troubles related to the Watergate affair. As soon as I spoke these words, Chancellor Brandt became highly emotional. He started out by telling me that "this sort of thing happens in Germany all the time but America is the only country left in the world where it makes any difference."

Brandt proceeded to expand on this point of view, telling me about his experiences living in Florida when he was out of power and "people down the street were nice to [his] children." He talked at great length about how America was the "hope and inspiration for the world." He said that "your country's moral and ethical foundations were the reason for America's unique place in the world."

Brandt became so emotional during this discussion that tears started streaming down his face.

So here I was, on Hermann Goering's former private train with a head of state, in tears, talking about the greatness of America.

Brandt added something about the "shame" Germans felt about starting the two greatest wars in history.

This dramatic experience taught me something we Americans should never forget, namely that before we criticize our own country too much, we should take a look at what routinely goes on in other nations.

By the time we reached Bonn, Chancellor Brandt had calmed down and returned to his jolly self, telling jokes and conversing about many topics.

A short, stocky man, Brandt was a lot of fun to be with. It is of some interest that he was an illegitimate child born in very meager circumstances. From these humble beginnings, he rose to head the most powerful nation in Europe. He became chancellor at the age of 55 after serving as mayor of West Berlin.

We parted in Bonn in a most friendly way, and I returned to the United States with memories of a remarkable encounter, the most unusual I have ever had with a head of state.

Following my trip to West Germany, I wrote some articles for *The Plain Dealer* about my experiences and was asked to go on the NBC television "Today Show," where I was interviewed by Frank McGee, one of the best hard-news commentators and interviewers of the day.

During our discussion of my trip and interviews with various heads of state, McGee brought up the fact that Europeans must be laughing up their

sleeves about America's troubles with Watergate and shocked by President Nixon's involvement. I answered McGee by telling him of my remarkable experience with Chancellor Brandt and what Brandt had said about America. This recitation stopped McGee short. There was a silence, and then he said, "Well, that is really interesting."

Brandt came to prominence at a time when Germany had moved beyond guilt about the Nazi atrocities of World War II. Thanks to the Marshall Plan and the tremendous energy and ability of the West German people, a "new nation" had emerged on a democratic basis from the ashes of defeat. Yet Brandt believed that the future for his country was within a united Europe.

Brandt left office somewhat under a cloud, even though he had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for achieving détente with the Soviet Union. There were security leaks in his administration for which he had to take some of the blame.

Brandt died in 1992 at age 78. I found him an interesting and enjoyable person who helped me in a most unexpected way to renew my love and faith in the United States of America.

JOHN S. KNIGHT

Newspaperman

One of my remarkable friends was a fellow journalist, John S. Knight of Akron, Ohio, a founder of the Knight newspaper chain (later Knight-Ridder).

Although we belonged to different generations, "Jack" Knight and I were birds of a feather. We hit it off from the first day we met and became particularly close after I became publisher and editor of *The Plain Dealer* in 1963. The morning PD was something of a rival to Knight's *Akron Beacon Journal*, then an evening paper only 45 minutes away by car and very much within our circulation area.

In spite of our keen competition, Knight and I became fast friends because we looked at the newspaper business in the same way. He believed, as I do, that a newspaper should belong to no party or ideology, should pursue the news fearlessly and tirelessly, always presenting both sides of an issue. We both believed that a newspaper would grow and prosper by concentrating first on providing high-quality editorial content that is an evenhanded account of developments in the community the paper serves. We both thought that circulation was then likely to follow and later advertising would increase, paying for a quality product. We both wrote personal columns about issues and personalities in the news.

Knight had a great flair for the newspaper business, similar to that of such legendary publishers as William Randolph Hearst. Born newspapermen like Hearst and Knight pursued the news relentlessly and built an empire of many newspapers in the process. Knight was also unusual as a publisher-owner in that he was a fine reporter and writer.

Born in 1894 in West Virginia and brought up in Akron, Ohio, Knight was the son of C. L. Knight, who rose from advertising manager of the

Akron Beacon Journal to become one of its owners. After his father died in 1933, Jack Knight became editor and publisher of the paper at the age of 39. An attractive person of above-average height, he always had a twinkle in his eye and possessed a good sense of (quite witty) humor. He was an excellent low-handicap golfer.

In Knight's view, the editor was more important to a paper's success than the publisher. Although he built one of the nation's largest newspaper chains, he took greater pride in his weekly column, "The Editor's Notebook," which he wrote for almost 40 years. In 1968 the column won a Pulitzer Prize for distinguished editorial writing, most notably because of Knight's original and relentless opposition to the Vietnam War.

Knight set aside a day a week to write his column and issued instructions that no one was to interrupt him that day.

Although regarded by some as "imperial" and "opinionated," I found him instead aggressive in the search for news, always seeking the truth of the matter, but easily bored by people not as talented as he.

Knight was a reporter and writer to the ends of his fingertips. He loved the pursuit of news and in some ways reminded me of the late Henry R. (Harry) Luce, founder of *Time* and *Life*, in that neither he nor Luce wasted time on anyone who did not have something interesting to say right off the bat.

As a writer, Knight did not have quite the depth and ability to brilliantly analyze people and issues that distinguished another famous journalist, Winston Churchill. But Knight had a keener sense of "news" than did Churchill. This was perhaps because Knight approached events as a reporter, while Churchill described them as a participant. Both wrote clearly and simply, in a direct style everyone could understand.

As is the case with most true journalists, I was never able to discern whether Knight was a liberal or a conservative. He was not interested in ideologies or philosophies. He was not negative and was only interested in hearing from people who thought they had a plan to make our society better. Practical to the core, Jack Knight loved bright people with constructive ideas.

Sad to relate, prominent figures like John Shively Knight are fading from the newspaper scene.

Today the newspaper business is more about publishing than editing, more about making money and improving stock values than reporting on and

assessing the issues of the day. Knight himself told me that he was very disappointed by the focus of the executive meetings he attended after Knight Newspapers merged with the Minnesota-based Ridder Publications in 1974, forming the Knight-Ridder organization. Knight lamented that the deliberations then centered mainly on money, budgets, the cost of newsprint—everything but the news.

Like most fine journalists, Jack Knight possessed the sharp, questioning mind of a city editor. His aim was always to verify the facts and present them in a coherent way. He was a remarkable, natural-born newspaperman, who died in 1981 at the age of 86, after leading an interesting, accomplished life, devoted to the passionate pursuit of the news.

YOUSUF KARSH

Photographer

A Christian Armenian who immigrated to Canada, Yousuf Karsh was one of the most brilliant people I have ever met.

His written insights about the celebrated individuals he photographed were almost as profound and penetrating as his fabled black-and-white portraits. He always did considerable research on his subjects.

I first met Yousuf Karsh when I was in my late 30s. In 1965, I was asked by the then chairman of the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency to speak at the National Advertising Association's annual meeting at the Greenbrier Hotel in West Virginia. Yousuf Karsh was also a speaker. We established a rapport right away.

Karsh came to visit my wife, Iris, and me soon after in Cleveland and expected to take my photograph. As I was only 39 at the time and had only three years before been named publisher and editor of *The Plain Dealer*, I thought I should wait a while longer to see whether I (hopefully) became worthy of his artistic attention.

Karsh gave Iris and me a present for inviting him to our home. It was a copy of his marvelous book, *Portraits of Greatness*, containing 96 of Karsh's most memorable photographic portraits selected by the artist who created them. A comprehensive array of the 20th century's most important people, it included church leaders, businessmen, artists, musicians, playwrights, actors, scientists and heads of state. Karsh wrote to us inside his book as follows: "For Iris and Thomas Vail, whose enthusiasm and far-reaching ideals express the highest inspirations of the young generation they represent so nobly."

What a lovely inscription for a 39-year-old and his young wife!

In 1991, the year of my retirement from *The Plain Dealer*, I finally "sat" for Karsh in New York. I was then 65.

In preparation for taking your picture, Karsh asked if you would send him some biographical material and anything else you cared to share about your thoughts and interests. He also suggested what color combinations for your suit, shirt and tie would show off to best effect on the black-and-white film he usually used.

Karsh photographed me in plain, simple surroundings. He posed me sitting in an armchair and brilliantly arranged the lighting to bring about a striking result. Karsh understood light as well as Rembrandt.

The whole scene was something out of the past. When photographing, Karsh draped an old-fashioned black cloth over his head and squeezed the bulb on a rubber hose to activate the camera shutter. His camera was an old Kodak circa 1908 with a Zeiss lens. Karsh told me this particular lens was so important to him, he carried it in his pocket wherever he went. He used large-format, 8 x 10 film.

Although Karsh took many pictures of politicians and businessmen, his favorite subjects were artists, like himself. One of Karsh's most famous pictures was of Winston Churchill who, although a politician, was also a journalist, artist and accomplished writer.

In 1941, Churchill addressed the Canadian parliament in Ottawa, where Karsh lived. He was invited to photograph the then British prime minister. According to Karsh, who related this famous story to me with relish, Churchill arrived smoking a cigar. Karsh, having set his camera, took one look at Churchill through his lens, walked up to the great man, snatched the cigar from Churchill's mouth and—snap—took the picture. This audacious act by Karsh, who was then only 33, produced on film the defiant look that shows what Churchill was really like. Churchill was cordial enough to say afterwards to Karsh, "You can even make a roaring lion stand still to be photographed."

All this is true genius.

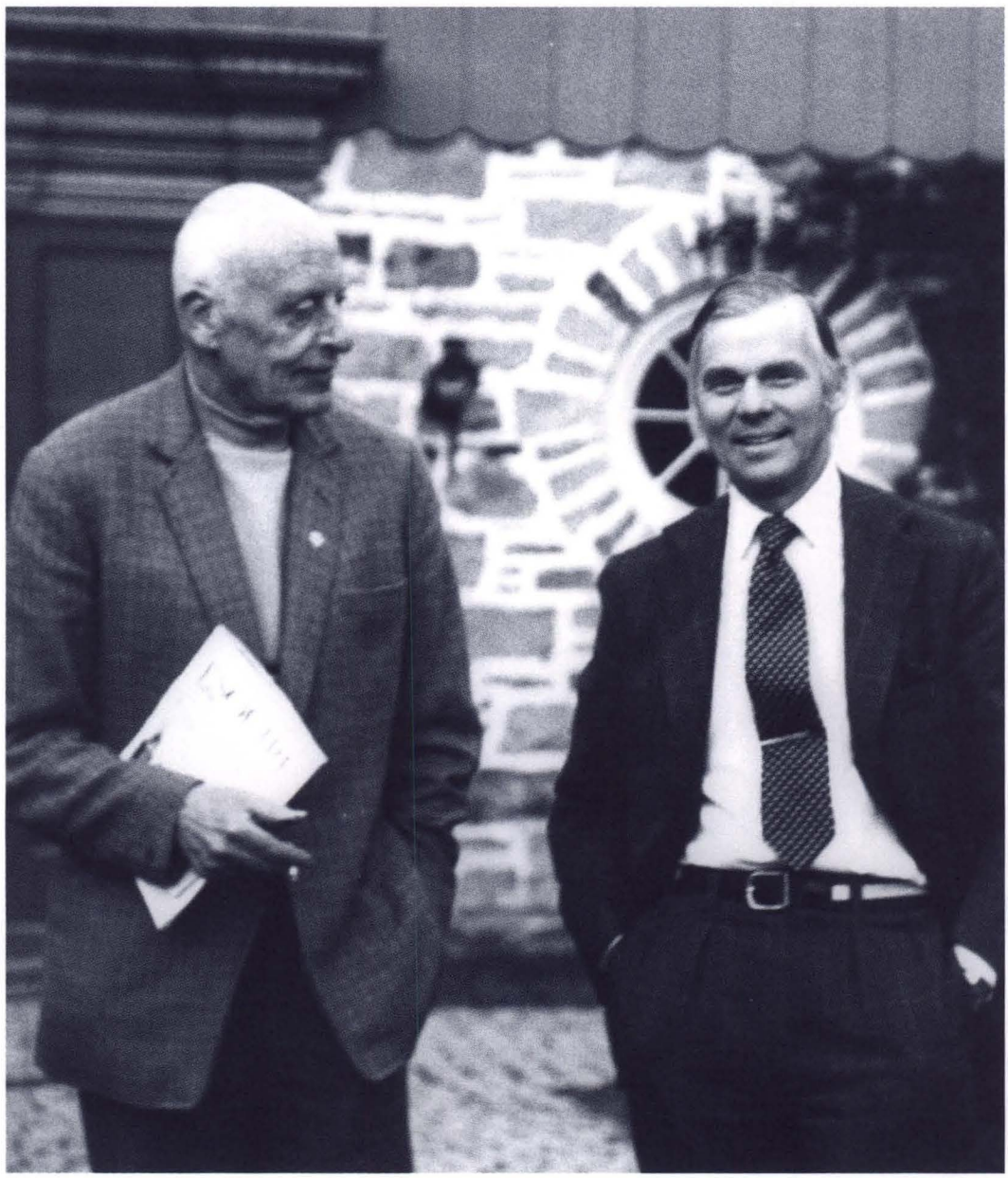
Karsh's dramatic and often moving portraits always give special insight into the character and personality of his subjects, which is why his photographs are among the most famous ever taken. Although he seemed to prefer

photographing men, his pictures of Eleanor Roosevelt, Marian Anderson and Queen Elizabeth are also among his most outstanding.

Karsh, like the landscape architect Russell Page, another genius profiled in these pages, was an excellent conversationalist, although he was not as broad gauge as Page about the affairs of the world. Karsh was more interested in personalities than issues. He wanted to find out what made people tick and capture it on film.

Karsh did his own developing and signed every picture he produced. He never shared his negatives with anyone and, although this priceless archive still exists, no one has ever been permitted to make copy prints from an original Karsh negative.

Karsh, who died in 2002 at age 93, was a true genius, much appreciated in his own time, whose pictures will always be admired for the great works of art they are.



RUSSELL PAGE

Landscape Architect

Another of my legendary acquaintances was the late, great landscape architect Russell Page, who died in 1985 at age 79.

I knew nothing about gardening and horticulture when I saw pictures in a 1975 issue of *Architectural Digest* of beautiful gardens designed by a British fellow named Russell Page. I had never heard of him.

I sent Page an aerial shot of our home, "L'Ecurie," fashioned from a stable where my wife, Iris, and I have lived our entire married lives, starting in 1951. I asked Page if he would be willing to take a look at the grounds of L'Ecurie and advise us about what could be done with the landscaping. He replied simply, "The next time you are in London, let me know and we can meet."

Shortly thereafter Iris and I had lunch with Page at the Berkeley Hotel in London. We hit it off, at least well enough that he agreed to come to Cleveland and take a look at L'Ecurie. This was rather a compliment, as he designed many more gardens in Europe than in America.

Russell Page was thought by many to be rather lordly and imperious. Clearly he did not suffer fools gladly. But he had worthwhile and special characteristics. He wanted to know and like the people for whom he worked. He was interested in the geology, the climate and the history of the areas in which he was asked to work. And he sincerely cared about fulfilling the wishes of his clients.

Once Page had studied the proposed garden site and was comfortable with the client, the project had to proceed on his terms. If, on an upcoming Monday, he needed two or three bulldozers to get started, they had to be there!

Page was the quintessential artist. He was both an architect and a plantsman. He was not interested in money. It was hard to get him to send you a bill.

Although British by birth and upbringing, Page leaned more toward the formal symmetry of the gardens of the great 17th-century French landscape architect André Le Nôtre than toward the flowing, "natural" designs of the also great British landscape architect of the 18th century, Lancelot "Capability" Brown.

For Page, "simplicity and structure" were fundamental starting points. He felt a garden must complement and enhance the house, as well.

Page had the "seeing eye" of all great artists. He would look at a site and suggest slight changes, such as the elimination of trees or the opening of a vista. He would "sculpt" the land, working closely with bulldozer operators to make sure they understood the contours he wanted to achieve.

He did not work from detailed, to-scale engineering drawings. He could draw almost to scale—in free hand! As the project went along, he would make adjustments, following his eye. Planting beds would complete his artistic concepts.

Like most geniuses, Page could see the maximum possibilities of a situation, creative opportunities most people would miss.

Often he took out more than he put in.

Few could argue with the results of his work. Like most great art, his gardens were simple, brilliant solutions, creating a dimension of beauty far beyond what most people could imagine.

At L'Ecurie, he leveled the area in front of our house and planted 48 (later to be "boxed") linden trees in the French style of perfect geometric rows that line up at 90 and 45 degrees on either side of the entrance courtyard. Outside the bay window of our library he constructed a superb small rill garden with a fountain, taking his inspiration from Iris' comment that we loved the 14th-century Generalife gardens at the Moorish Alhambra palace in Granada in southern Spain. He centered this new "room outside a room" on the center line of the library and completed it with native Ohio trees, hedges and plantings.

Iris, who has great taste, including in matters of horticulture, added many pots of flowers for color.

Page worked for many famous people around the world. Among his clients were the Duke of Windsor (when he was the Prince of Wales), the Marquis of Bath, the Duke of Beaufort, CBS founder William S. Paley and the Giovanni Agnellis of the Italian Fiat motor company. But Page never dropped names or gossiped. He had no particular opinions about the work of other land-

scape architects and never created a garden for himself. He often said he had no idea what kind of a garden he might want.

Page much preferred working for private individuals rather than for political or commercial clients. He liked a social environment that was refined and aristocratic. The lives of most of his clients reflected these characteristics. Russell Page had "class" and liked people who had it also.

Although he consulted with President George Pompidou of France and Lady Bird Johnson at the White House, he never completed projects for these political figures.

Tall and somewhat eccentric in manner, Page was an excellent conversationalist. He had many observations about the affairs of the world and topics other than gardening. Having worked in France during World War II for the British Broadcasting Corporation, he enjoyed conversing about the news of the day.

Strangely, this gardening genius is buried in an unmarked grave in a small churchyard at Badminton Hall in England, the seat of Page's friend, David Somerset, now Duke of Beaufort. It was Page's wish to be cremated and buried anonymously. Perhaps he wanted his superb gardens to be his memorial.

Whatever artists' personal characteristics may be, it is the results of their creative efforts that tell their story. Russell Page created works of art that will be admired as long as his fabulous gardens survive.

Most would consider Russell Page to be one of the most significant landscape architects of the 20th century. Some, myself included, would place his work in the same league as the gardens of such greats as Le Nôtre and Capability Brown. Like these famous "gardeners" of the past, Page had the touch of genius.

THE DUKE AND DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE

Historic Preservationists

The Duke and Duchess of Devonshire were the only remarkable couple both of whom I have known well enough to include in this book. Working together hand in glove, they preserved the duke's famous English manor house, Chatsworth, and its incredible treasures. Having accomplished something of special significance that would not have occurred without them, this duke and duchess are equally deserving of the description "legendary."

I first met the Duke of Devonshire, who died in May 2004, when he visited Cleveland on a speaking tour in 1976. He then invited my wife, Iris, and me to visit him at Chatsworth, just two-and-a-half hours' drive north of London in Derbyshire, on our way to shoot grouse with my cousin-in-law, Lord Allendale, whom Devonshire knew well.

The duke, who was born Lord Andrew Cavendish, would never have inherited his title, his fortune and his stately home had his older brother, Lord "Billy" Hartington, not been killed during World War II. As a result, it was Lord Andrew Cavendish who became the 11th Duke of Devonshire when his father died in 1950. In England the eldest offspring inherits everything, which is one of the reasons why the great English estates have survived.

With inheritance taxes imposed by the Labor government then at 80 percent, it did not look likely that the 11th duke would be able to hold on to all the family properties, including Chatsworth house, its fabled gardens and one of the most priceless collections of books, pictures and furniture still in private hands. But this Devonshire took the seemingly hopeless situation as a challenge. He was not about to give up on 300 years of his amazing family history.

Guided by a very able lawyer and in consultation with knowledgeable art and rare book dealers, the duke devised a plan to preserve Chatsworth, a national treasure.

Keep in mind the Cavendish family has been accumulating properties, rare books, art and wealth since the 1550s, when the canny commoner Bess of Hardwick managed to marry in succession the three richest men in England, including a Cavendish. It was Bess who began what later became Chatsworth, the historic seat of the Dukes of Devonshire. To my knowledge, no other single family has collected so much for so long and been able to keep most of its holdings intact.

Iris and I have spent many wonderful times with the Devonshires at Chatsworth. One evening I asked the duke how he had worked out the plan that allowed him to pay huge inheritance taxes and still retain Chatsworth. He modestly replied, "I listened." This comment is remarkable in itself. Unlike some aristocrats, Andrew Devonshire sought out able professionals and took their advice.

The key to saving Chatsworth was the duke's decision to give Hardwick Hall, another famous family manor, to the British government in lieu of taxes. In addition, as the huge value of the Chatsworth art collections began to be more fully understood, the duke arranged for a small portion to be sold.

Chatsworth had been open to the public since the mid 19th century. To help with the upkeep, the duke expanded visiting hours to six days a week. The only section of the manor that cannot be toured are the private rooms for the family and their guests.

Andrew Devonshire was a much more able and perceptive person than he himself or some others gave him credit for. A keen student of politics until his death at the age of 84, he seemed to follow a rather liberal line, certainly not the usual Tory (Conservative) Party view. Like his wife, he had a great command of the English language and wrote well.

Now comes the second half of this remarkable story, namely, Andrew Devonshire's choice of a wife. Deborah Mitford married Lord Andrew Cavendish when she was 20, three years before he became a duke, a title neither of them contemplated would be his. Amazingly, the Devonshires were married for 63 years. Considering that the Mitfords were a titled and talented but not a wealthy family, this was obviously a marriage for love.

Years ago no one could have predicted the enormous abilities of this lady, who was to take on the day-to-day responsibility of running Chatsworth and devote herself to its enhancement for more than 50 years.

"Debo" Devonshire, as she is called by her friends, is a natural beauty and a brilliant businesswoman. She writes superbly and, best of all, has a great sense of humor. And she carries her duties off in a natural way that is famously appealing to everyone from all walks of life. Like her late husband (and most true aristocrats), she never puts on airs. She pursues her ideas with great energy, even as an octogenarian.

To add to the appeal of Chatsworth and its collections, which are now cataloged so well, the duchess opened a wonderful restaurant in a huge stable on the grounds and has filled other former farm buildings with some of the smartest shops from London. Chatsworth's carpenters produce garden furniture that is sold all over the world.

I once mentioned to Debo that Iris and I were looking forward to attending the Chelsea Flower Show as guests of the royal family. She said, "Well, Tom, you won't see me inside with the 'Royals,' because I will be outside with the commercial people selling things from Chatsworth." In spite of her exalted social and economic position, Debo Devonshire loves business and is a whiz at it.

The story of her accomplishments does not end here. Debo is a writer of great skill. She has not only produced excellent books on the history of Chatsworth and its collections, but also a hilarious best-seller called *Counting My Chickens.*

Like most persons with great taste, the duchess never employs decorators or landscape architects. She works directly with craftspeople to realize her own ideas about the historically correct decorating of Chatsworth.

At one time I had hoped that the famed British landscape architect Russell Page, who designed our gardens in Cleveland, might make a trip to Chatsworth, if only just to see the manor house and its legendary gardens. But the visit never took place, although I suggested the idea to the duchess a couple of times. I suspect the reason may be that she did not need (or want) Page's advice.

The gardens at Chatsworth are legendary. They were designed in the 18th century by one of Britain's most famous landscape architects, Lancelot "Capability" Brown, and enhanced in the mid 19th century by Sir Joseph Paxton, designer of the Crystal Palace for the Great Exhibition of 1851 in

London. In addition to glorious plantings, Chatsworth's garden features fountains, a famous cascade of water that disappears under the manor house and many picturesque vistas and walks. The duchess herself designed a stunning serpentine hedge. Having seen many of the world's great gardens, I believe Chatsworth's are in the top rank in terms of beauty and scale. The fact that they have been in the same hands for 300 years also makes them exceptional.

The Chatsworth collections are too extensive to describe in detail, except to note they include works by the most acclaimed artists and authors of the last 400 years. As an example, during one memorable evening Iris and I spent alone with the Devonshires, the four of us pored over their folios of Redouté's famous book of prints, *Les Roses*, open on the floor. A Holbein oil of King Henry VIII sat on an easel "overlooking" the scene.

What a great gift to humanity the Devonshires have made in preserving the very best art and architecture there is to see. They were a unique couple whose charm and generosity equaled what they have done for the pleasure and interest of so many. The duchess, who turned 84 in 2004, will carry on in her attractive and effective way the remarkable conservation effort she shared with her late husband.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF DEERFIELD ACADEMY ARCHIVES

Frank and Helen Boyden

FRANK L. BOYDEN

Headmaster

A genius I encountered early in my life was the universally admired headmaster of Deerfield Academy, Dr. Frank L. Boyden.

I attended Deerfield Academy in Deerfield, Massachusetts, in my teens, graduating in 1944. Dr. Boyden was Deerfield's headmaster from 1902 to 1968. He had a great effect on every person who ever came in contact with him. John McPhee profiled him in a series of articles in *The New Yorker* that were later made into a book called *The Headmaster.*

Frank Boyden became headmaster of Deerfield Academy at the age of 22. It was then a public school with seven students, and most locals thought it would soon close. No person other than Dr. Boyden wanted the position. By the time of his death in 1972 at the age of 92, he had built Deerfield Academy into an acclaimed private school of 500 students, still with a small public enrollment of local residents.

Dr. Boyden, whom everyone called "The Head," knew more about young boys and how to inculcate in them solid principles than any other person I have ever known. This assessment is not mine alone and is shared by every other person to whom I have ever talked who knew and was influenced by Dr. Boyden.

It is difficult to summarize the genius, the high morality and splendid principles of Frank Boyden.

Some light can be shed on the subject by Dr. Boyden himself. As he told author McPhee, "The object of the school should be the development of character, to help each pupil to do that for which he is best suited. This can be done in the country because the comparatively small numbers make it possible to do much personal work and the relationship between pupil and teacher becomes more intimate."

A letter written by Dr. Boyden that McPhee reproduces in his book adds the further explanation that ". . . in my work I have just gone ahead from

day to day without any particular theory or any particular policy except a real personal interest in the boys, in their work, and in their activities."

Amazingly, Dr. Boyden knew and understood every one of the 500 or so boys who attended Deerfield Academy in my day. His office in the main school building was a desk in an open area where he could observe his students changing classes all day long.

There was no demerit system at Deerfield. When boys got in trouble, they were talked to by the headmaster, who told them in so many ways that what they had been doing was "just not the right thing to do." After such a talk with the headmaster, no one ever felt like acting up again.

I remember in particular one of the times Dr. Boyden visited our dorm. To my astonishment he told me that one of his former students (whom I knew from my hometown of Cleveland) "did not at first know how to study." I could not believe that the headmaster of 500 students could possibly have discerned a detail like that.

During World War II, we "privileged" (as we were sometimes called) academy students from affluent families were required to go into the fields surrounding the town of Deerfield and pick potatoes to compensate for a wartime shortage of farmhands. As The Head explained to us, "We should be able to show that our students could do the job even better than the local farmhands who had picked potatoes all their lives." Of course, we all worked to prove him right!

Dr. Boyden instilled in us through talks and various school activities that, as we came from privileged backgrounds, we were required to go into the world and prove that we were worthy of the place into which we had been born.

One of the foundations of a Deerfield education was a seemingly endless vocabulary test. We were required to look up long lists of words in the dictionary and memorize their meanings. What an awful task, seemingly so boring at the time. But it stood us in such good stead afterwards. As Winston Churchill often remarked, a most important thing is to learn your own language.

Dr. Boyden believed in athletics and team play. But his belief in sports did not translate solely into having the best high school or prep school teams. He created an intramural system for all ages and all abilities. He thought that team play and an effort on the athletic field would serve us well in our future endeavors, regardless of our athletic ability.

No one who ever attended Deerfield Academy had anything but the highest respect for Frank Boyden. He knew us, he talked to us, and he instilled

in us his morals, integrity and standards of excellence.

Frank L. Boyden was a rather small man, no more than 5'4" who always wore a dark blue double-breasted suit and thick glasses. He was in evidence everywhere. He attended sports events, visited dormitories, organized religious services and counseled his students in every possible way. He was never severe or demanding, never lost his temper, and was always "full of humanity and understanding."

And he had a very talented and accomplished wife. Helen Boyden taught chemistry and encouraged everyone in the pursuit of high standards, not only in academics but in the development of their characters as well.

I went to Deerfield because my parents had previously selected it for my brother, who had been struggling academically and needed one year more of high school before he went to college. Deerfield was one of the few prep schools that would accept one-year students. I suspect Dr. Boyden accepted such students precisely so that he could help them achieve more in college. Seeing how everything worked out so well for my brother, my parents were so impressed by Dr. Boyden that they thought the experience at Deerfield would be good for me, too. I am sure the education I received at the academy eventually helped me to graduate with honors from Princeton University.

Frank Boyden has been written into history as one of the finest educators who ever lived. In addition, he occupies a special place in the hearts and minds of every one of his students. He was a genius in the truest sense of the word.

McPhee's book, *The Headmaster*, says it all:

"His school evolved naturally, gradually, and surprisingly. He had no plan and no theory, but he proved himself to be an educator by intuition. College professors and college presidents became aware of his work and sent their sons to him. Others did the same. By the late 1930s, it had become clear that he was one of the greatest headmasters in history, and for many years he stood alone as, in all probability, the last man of his kind."

Frank L. Boyden was remarkable and uplifting. He made of so many the best they could possibly be.

To unravel the mystique of this legendary educator, we might remember a simple message from the Bible that has echoed down the centuries. It comes from 1 Corinthians:

". . . faith, hope, and love . . . and the greatest of these is love."

Frank Boyden loved us—and we loved him.

Let this be his epitaph.


MELI
54

WINDSOR THOMAS WHITE

Businessman and Sportsman

Happily for me, Windsor T. White of Cleveland was my grandfather. He was remarkable in many ways. The son of the founder of an important business, he helped to found an important business as well. He created on his own a sporting lifestyle that dominated the area in which he lived: a village called Hunting Valley near Cleveland, Ohio. When he died in 1958 at age 91, he was the largest property owner in Cuyahoga County, holding more than 1,000 acres in his valley sporting estate.

Windsor White was born in Orange, Massachusetts, in 1867. He was the son of Thomas Howard White, who founded the White Sewing Machine Company.

Windsor came to Cleveland when his father moved the White Sewing Machine Company to the city in 1875. Windsor then attended Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts, class of 1890. In 1900, he and two of his brothers founded the White Motor Company of Cleveland, later one of the largest makers of heavy-duty trucks in the United States.

Windsor was a quiet, attractive-looking, solidly built person about 5'8" tall. Because of a love of sport, particularly fox hunting (a pursuit developed by the English), he became an ardent Anglophile. Windsor liked everything English. He admired their sporting traditions, which inspired him to found the Chagrin Valley Fox Hounds in 1915, using English rather than American fox hounds. He dressed in English clothes usually made by an English tailor, Bernard Weatherill of New York City and London. Following English tradition, he went on several African safaris in the 1920s and '30s that provided major animal collections for the Cleveland Museum of Natural History.

Whatever Windsor did, he felt it should meet a very high standard. One of his favorite remarks was "always maintain your standards."

The White Motor Company founded by Windsor and his two brothers started out making the "White Steamer," an early motorcar, and then became one of the most important makers of heavy-duty trucks and buses in America, particularly during and after World War I. Of the three brothers, Windsor was regarded as the most practical businessman; his brother, Rollin, the inventive genius; and his other younger brother, Walter, the super salesman. This remarkable combination of brotherly talents produced such a successful company that Windsor was able to retire in 1927 at the age of 60 with a considerable fortune.

During the years of his business success, Windsor was also building a life as a remarkable American sporting figure in the English tradition.

Starting in 1915, he began to acquire farms in the Chagrin River Valley, about a 40-minute drive from Cleveland. His real estate representatives bought out farmers whose properties adjoined one another, ultimately assembling more than 1,000 acres for the great sporting estate Windsor envisioned. This magnificent property, which straddled both sides of the Chagrin River and included beautiful streams and waterfalls, ran on the west from Daisy Hill (the famous estate of the Van Sweringen brothers, Cleveland transportation and real estate tycoons) all the way to County Line Road on the east. On the north it was bordered by Shaker Boulevard and on the south by South Woodland Road.

A system of winding roads linked the various sections of the estate, home to huge apple orchards, an extensive dairy operation, beef cattle, sheep, 40,000 chickens, a polo stable with 40 stalls and an indoor riding ring, plus an outdoor polo field. It was called Halfred Farms, after one of Windsor's best hunting horses, which he rode to many hunter championships at the Chagrin Valley Hunt Horse Show and elsewhere.

No sporting estate near Cleveland could equal it, and few anywhere in the United States between the two world wars were as extensive or offered as many sporting activities.

A large number of people were required to maintain Halfred Farms. The stable alone had dormitory accommodations for the 18 grooms who worked there during the summer and the 13 needed during the winter. The riding head of the stable and the head of grooms had their own houses. There were kennels

sometimes housing as many as 50 or 60 dogs (including a pack of harrier hounds), a smithy for shoeing horses, garages for grooms, and a larger garage for the White Motor Company horse van.

Below the stable was an extensive horse-jumping course and across the river from the stables a pheasant shoot.

The main house of Halfred Farms was an enlarged farmhouse. Gardens planned by my grandmother were added in the 1920s by the noted landscape architect Ellen Shipman. The family compound featured a swimming pool (the first in Hunting Valley), tennis court, large garages, greenhouses and vegetable and flower-cutting gardens.

Just to get around this place, my wonderful mother, Windsor's daughter, Delia White Vail, bought me a little Bantam roadster car in 1940 so I could make my way from the residence to the stables and other beautiful areas of the estate.

A retinue of farmhands, grooms, maids, cooks, valets, butlers and chauffeurs worked hard to maintain all of this—the remarkable brainchild of Windsor White.

This fabulous way of life mostly disappeared everywhere after World War II. It lasted longer at Halfred Farms because my grandfather saw to it that the general operation of the estate continued, although on a less grand basis, until his death in 1958.

Windsor did not concern himself with the problems of the world or the struggles of people at lower levels of our society. He was not particularly intellectual or interested in books, pictures, music or cultural things in general.

He was in essence a down-to-earth, practical, elegant sporting gentleman who had great knowledge and understanding, particularly about fox hunting and shooting with a shotgun or rifle. Somewhat a "man's man," he did not electrify people with his conversation and was rather quiet. But he did not miss a trick or suffer fools gladly. He was a great listener and normal to the core. He married well, taking as his wife Delia Holden, the daughter of Liberty E. Holden, a mining mogul and the owner of Cleveland's *Plain Dealer* newspaper.

Windsor's wife and friends shared his Anglo-Saxon background, and most of his friends shared his sporting interests. As one of them, the late sporting gentleman David Wagstaff of Tuxedo Park, New York, said to me when I was 15, "Stick with your grandfather, Tom. He is a grand sportsman."

Little has been written about Windsor White because so few people knew him as I did. I was 31 years old when he died at age 91.

His wife, Delia Holden White, is worthy of comment in her own right. Her father, Liberty Holden, came from Maine and became a professor at the University of Michigan. Later he went into the mining business, acquiring gold and silver mines and helping to develop the Bingham open-cut copper mine near Salt Lake City, the largest such enterprise in the world. Tapping into a considerable fortune from mining, Liberty Holden purchased *The Plain Dealer* in 1885. As he himself said of his entrepreneurial bent: "He fell from grace and went into business."

Liberty and his wife, Delia Bulkley Holden, acquired a major collection of early Italian art from holdings in the Jarvis collection. (Half of the paintings from that important collection went to Yale University.) The Holdens helped to found the Cleveland Museum of Art with a gift of major art works. Liberty Holden became chairman of the art museum's first building committee in 1915.

His son, Albert, made a fortune of his own as the founder of the Island Creek Coal Company. He bequeathed his estate to start the 3,200-acre Holden Arboretum near Cleveland, the second largest arboretum in the United States.

Liberty Holden's daughter, the wife of Windsor White, was a civic activist, who believed like most members of the Holden family that people of means should help others less fortunate.

Delia White did not share her husband's love of sports. Instead she pursued many interests that are part of the civic fabric of Cleveland to this day. She was a founder of the Garden Club of Cleveland and a founder in 1930 of the Garden Center of Greater Cleveland, now the Cleveland Botanical Garden. The latter was an effort to promote gardening for the general public welfare. Her relatives (Whites and Holdens) supported the founding in 1913 of the Community Chest (now United Way) and in 1916 the creation of The Cleveland Foundation, the country's first community foundation, which today is second only to New York's community foundation in the size of its endowment.

One of the ways to evaluate a legendary figure is by his or her achievements. Windsor White was remarkable because, although the son of a successful man, he helped start a major automobile and truck business in the United States and created one of the most beautiful sporting estates to be found anywhere in

the country. He knew what was "best" and had most of it during his long lifetime.

For whatever reasons, Windsor did not press his two sons to go to work as he had done. He accepted their decision to mainly pursue a gentleman's sporting life, playing polo, shooting and enjoying the tasteful trappings of old wealth that Windsor and his father provided for them.

On the other hand, his daughter, Delia—my mother—was a spark plug. She had the drive and imagination of her successful ancestors. She married my father, Herman L. Vail, in 1922. "Dutch" Vail was a tall, handsome Clevelander, a graduate of Princeton University and Harvard law school, who became a respected Cleveland attorney, civic leader and trustee of my mother's Holden family properties. He was chairman of the board of Laurel and University Schools and the Western Reserve Historical Society, and he served as president of The Union Club and The Country Club. At one time my father was a low-six handicap golfer, and as a teenager he became the junior interscholastic tennis champion of Cleveland.

Herman Vail enjoyed rare books and put together an important collection. It contained major early works about the Hudson's Bay Company and the search for the Northwest Passage, first editions of all of Winston Churchill's works, first editions of other famous English authors such as Edward Gibbon and Charles Dickens, and many rare color-plate books.

My mother expected a lot of my brother and me. Anytime one of us fell from a horse, she told us to remount and ride again. She believed in achievement and would accept no less. She had an outgoing enthusiastic personality, and everyone, including me, loved her dearly. Unfortunately, she died prematurely of cancer in 1952 at age 55, after 30 years of marriage.

I hope she would have approved of what I have tried to do.

I learned and inherited a lot from Windsor White, including a desire always to do my best. My interests are not, like his, only business and blood sports, but in these two areas my grandfather provided opportunities and set standards for which I have always striven.

It has been a pleasure for me and my wife to live for more than 50 years on some of his land and to pursue so many sports that I most likely never would have known so well had he not introduced me to them.

I hope, like my grandfather, I have made the most of my opportunities and, like him, "maintained my standards."

LEGENDS ARE PEOPLE WHO LEAVE
"FOOTSTEPS ON THE SANDS OF TIME."